DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 474 926 CS 511 865

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TITLE	A Qualitative Study Describing the Meaning-Making Processes of College Freshmen as They Respond to Poetry.
PUB DATE	2002-11-07
NOTE	32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (29th, Chattanooga, TN, November 6-8, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cognitive Processes; *College Freshmen; Higher Education; *Poetry; *Reader Response
IDENTIFIERS	Social Construction

ABSTRACT

As study investigated the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpreted and discussed poetry. Through the theory base of Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric, students' individual construction of meaning and their social construction and negotiation of meaning, respectively, as they interpreted poems was studied. The qualitative research methods of participant observation was used: the collection of artifacts included student compositions, handwritten notes, and audiotaped discussions from small-group work; purposive sampling of these artifacts; questionnaires; and field notes. The researcher placed herself as a full participant observer, since she served as both professor and researcher in her own classroom. For each theory, the researcher identified and described categories of the meaning-making processes derived from the artifacts, and she used the constant comparative method for refining them. She used maximum variation sampling of the student compositions and the audiotaped discussions in selecting salient examples to demonstrate these meaning-making processes for both theories. By identifying descriptive categories to delineate the students' thinking processes both individually and communally, professors and researchers can observe how the participants constructed comprehensive interpretations by rethinking their initial responses, by negotiating their points of difference and points of agreement, and by incorporating into their own compositions their reactions to each other's views. Through these categories of meaning construction, educators can have more awareness of the possible thinking behaviors of students, that is, the different ways they relate to poetry and to each other in discourse communities. Contains 21 references and a table. An appendix contains student individual and communal responses to the poems. (Author/RS)

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Running head: MEANING-MAKING PROCESSES

A Qualitative Study Describing the Meaning-Making Processes of College Freshmen as They Respond to Poetry

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of

The Mid-South Educational Research Association

Chattanooga, Tennessee

November 7, 2002

ED 474 926

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Abstract

I investigated the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpreted and discussed poetry. Through the theory base of Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric, I studied the students' individual construction of meaning and their social construction and negotiation of meaning, respectively, as they interpreted poems. I used the qualitative research methods of participant observation; a collection of artifacts that included student compositions, handwritten notes, and audiotaped discussions from small-group work; purposive sampling of these artifacts; questionnaires; and field notes. I placed myself as a full participant observer, since I served as both professor and researcher in my own classroom. For each theory, I identified and described categories of the meaning-making processes derived from the artifacts, and I used the constant comparative method for refining them. I used maximum variation sampling of the student compositions and the audiotaped discussions in selecting salient examples to demonstrate these meaning-making processes for both theories.

By my identifying descriptive categories to delineate the students' thinking processes both individually and communally, professors and researchers can observe how the participants constructed comprehensive interpretations by rethinking their initial responses, by negotiating their points of difference and points of agreement, and by incorporating into their own compositions their reactions to each other's views. Through these categories of meaning construction, we can have more awareness of the possible thinking behaviors of students, that is, the different ways they relate to poetry and to each other in discourse communities.

A Qualitative Study Describing the Meaning-Making Processes of College Freshmen as They Respond to Poetry

The purpose of my research was to identify, describe, and demonstrate the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpreted and discussed poetry. In attempting to explain these processes, I demonstrated how Reader-Response Theory (a literary theory) and the New Rhetoric (a rhetorical theory) could be put into practice in the classroom as a theory base for instruction. By focusing first on the individual construction of meaning and then on the social construction and negotiation of meaning, I observed a recursive, cumulative process as students constructed their interpretations of poetry over a six-week unit and as they moved towards consensus on possible interpretations.

I conducted my research at a two-year college. The participants were eighteen students from one intact class taking the second course in freshman composition, which included a six-week unit on introduction to poetry that spanned from January 16 through March 1, 2001. I used qualitative research methods for my investigation: participant observation and purposive sampling of a collection of artifacts that included word-processed student compositions, student handwritten notes, and audiotaped discussions from small-group work. In addition, I distributed pre- and post-questionnaires and took field notes.

Theoretical Basis

Both Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric recognize the postmodernist view that reality offers no permanent, objective truth; thereby, literature reflects the subjectivity, ambiguity, and conflicts of an unstable reality. Accordingly, reader-response theorists believe that meaning in a poem

is activated by the mind of the reader rather than being inherent in the text itself. Their focus is on the work as experienced by a reader that transcends both the text and the reader (Fish, 1970/1980; Iser, 1974/1980; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). Fish (1970/1980) asserts, "The objectivity of the text is an illusion" (p. 82) and there are "no fixed texts, but only interpretive strategies making them" (Fish, 1976/1980, p. 183). A reader constructs meaning for a poem through a process that is recursive and cumulative as he or she reads and rereads the poem, accessing prior knowledge and experience, utilizing new information, modifying thinking, and making associations. As a reader brings prior knowledge and experience to different reading events for the same poem, he or she can further modify interpretation by rereading, reflecting, and accumulating meaning over time. Furthermore, reader-response theorists recognize that readers can construct multiple interpretations of the same poem rather than determining one unchanging explication (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994).

This recursive, cumulative process is also evident in the social construction of meaning of the New Rhetoric as members of a discourse community build and negotiate meaning by offering their prior knowledge and experience, their reflections and associations in their movement towards consensus about viable interpretations of a poem. From the New Rhetoric's perspective, the conversation is ongoing; members strive for perfect agreement but this achievement is unlikely, since the text is not regarded as an object independent of interpretation and since each member brings a particular and unique perspective to the conversation (Perelman, 1979; Crosswhite, 1996).

Each member of a discourse community has an equal voice in the cooperative search for meaning, supporting neither agreement nor difference

exclusively but instead being open to the perspectives of others. As Crosswhite (1996) claims, differences are not obstacles to be overcome. Trimbur's (1989) notion of dissensus advocates a deferral of agreement for a mutual exchange of differences with the important focus being understanding among the participants rather than reaching agreement. Rorty (1979) believes the ongoing conversation is more important than finding "objective truth" (p. 377). An individual can change, modify, or defend his or her view in light of other interpretations without feeling pressured to overcome difference. By deferring consensus, members promote a negotiation of meaning to achieve understanding of other views and mutual respect for them.

Methodology

Participant Observation

Spradley (1980) defines the participant observer's purpose as "to engage in activities appropriate to the situation" and "to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation" (p. 54). In both engaging and observing, the participant observer experiences "being both insider and outsider simultaneously" and "alternating between the insider and outsider experience" (p. 57). Accordingly, Spradley defines the observer's involvement along a continuum of types that range from nonparticipation to complete participation. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) define this "full participant" as "simultaneously a functioning member of the community undergoing investigation and an investigator" (p. 40). I placed myself along this continuum at the highest level of involvement, complete participation or full participant, because I was both professor and researcher in my own classroom.

I chose the classroom setting, since I was not investigating students' responses out of the normal context of their classroom experiences. The research involved actual assignments that students normally complete in my freshman composition course. I obtained informed consent and noted that the only departures from the normal routine would be questionnaires and audiotaped group work. Since my purpose was to observe how theory translates into practice within naturally occurring events, I did not use case studies.

Artifacts

To establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I provided triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) through multiple sources of data depicting the meaning-making processes. The artifacts for the study were student compositions, handwritten student notes, and audiotaped small-group work. I define a *reading* of a poem as a composition or verbal report that reflects a student's thinking as he or she constructs meaning. Students brought to class a Reading One (1½ word-processed pages) as a first response to a poem that was written individually without the input of other classmates or the professor. Reading Two (2½ to 3 word-processed pages) was a composition that demonstrated the student's comprehensive understanding of the same poem, written after the student had read the Readings One of other classmates and discussed the poem with them in the small-group work, with three to four students comprising each group, and after receiving feedback from me for Reading One. I changed the group mixes each week so that students could work with a variety of others and experience multiple viewpoints and writing styles.

I divided the class period into three segments of approximately 25 minutes each. In the first segment, students read each other's Readings One, taking handwritten notes that especially targeted agreements and conflicts as well as any new information and insights discovered. Students wrote down each other's first names beside the points taken. For the second segment, students discussed their points of agreement and difference and any new insights that developed. I audiotaped each of the four or five groups per class session because I wanted to obtain as much data as possible for my later selecting salient examples.

The third segment involved a plenary session wherein each group reported their possible interpretations to the class. Once again as discussion continued, the students took notes on any new views or insights and any differences or agreements they found interesting. I collected and graded Readings One and returned them by the next class. For conducting my research, I made photocopies of the Readings One, with their attached handwritten notes, before returning them. I placed this material in folders labeled for each student.

Approximately every other week, students selected one poem from those studied to write Reading Two, which synthesized Reading One and the handwritten notes, both from the small-group and plenary sessions. For this second reading, students defended, changed, or modified their views of the poem and indicated acceptance or rejection of other possible interpretations as determined by the group and classroom consensus building. They argued their points of agreement and points of difference with the other readings from their group and class discussions to arrive at a final comprehensive reading, citing

student first names in their compositions. To protect the anonymity of my students, I assigned pseudonyms in my reporting the data and results of the study.

For the poetry unit, students completed ten Readings One and three Readings Two. I collected and graded Readings Two and returned them. For my research, I made photocopies of Readings Two to place in the student folders along with the Readings One. In matching a Reading One with a Reading Two for the same poem, I could observe the recursive, cumulative process evident in the progression from individual construction of meaning to social construction and negotiation of meaning. I did not incorporate grading into the study because my focus was on studying the meaning-making processes inherent in the two theories rather than on doing assessment.

Purposive Sampling

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to generalizability as transferability and claim "the degree of *transferability* is a direct function of the *similarity* between the two contexts, what we shall call *'fittingness'* . . . the degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts" (p. 124). I used maximum variation sampling "to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 201). Since my classes included students with various levels of ability, I projected that the data obtained would represent a wide range of proficiency in that students of different abilities are typically found in freshman classrooms. The thick description I obtained from the maximum-variation sampling can support a transfer to similar classroom contexts. Ultimately, the research consumer must decide the degree of "fit" a particular study has for his or her particular context and "to provide the *data*

base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide certain characteristics for sampling. The sample must emerge from the design and not be specified in advance, it can be refined to target the most relevant information in terms of emerging patterns, and sampling is ended when information becomes redundant (pp. 201-202). To comply with Lincoln and Guba' s criteria, I allowed my categories of the meaning-making processes to emerge from the data, being careful to make them my own even though I could not help being influenced by reading other research studies (Dias, 1996; Earthman, 1992; Langer, 1992, 1993). However, as Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) contend, "The categories that emerge should be considered as one analyst's organization of the data. It is possible that no other scholar would discover the same categories" (p. 118). Although similar to those in other studies, I believe my categories are unique because I have identified, described, and organized them to reflect my particular research experience.

I developed major categories and subcategories for both Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric to identify and describe the meaning-making processes, that is, the meaning-building and consensus-building processes I observed (see Table on page 17). To demonstrate these categories, I selected salient examples from the student compositions (Readings One and Two), handwritten notes, and audiotaped small-group discussions. These examples represent the recursive, cumulative process in students' constructing meaning both individually and then communally in the social construction and negotiation of meaning as demonstrated in the group work.

For narrowing my focus in studying these artifacts, I chose to report on Readings One and Two in combination for each student, thereby including only the Readings One that paired with Readings Two. Each student produced this combination for three out of the ten poems studied. Consequently, I used the remaining Readings One from students not choosing to write again on a particular poem to verify any information other students used from these first readings for their Readings Two.

The group/class handwritten notes that accompanied Reading One, which were included in the Readings One and Two packet, were helpful in confirming from whom a student obtained information included in Reading Two. The audiotapes served to further verify material from other students incorporated in the Readings Two, especially when particular points were not indicated in a student's notes.

Questionnaires

I administered both pre- and post-questionnaires to my students as a method of anonymous self-report. I had set out to gain insight from the questionnaires about the students' experiences with the poetry. The preliminary questionnaire required students to describe their past experiences with reading poetry; the post-questionnaire included my students' reactions to poetry after completing the unit. I had expected a 100% return rate for both questionnaires, whereas, according to Gay (1992), 70% is needed to validate any conclusions. The actual return rate was 72% for the pre-questionnaire and 33% for the post-questionnaire. Since I could not provide an adequate point-by-point comparison of the two questionnaires, I focused the study on the Readings One and Two and the audiotapes as the major components.

Field Notes

I attempted to write notes on the meaning-building and consensus-building processes in the classroom. I had hoped to be able to listen to student discussions and capture their essence when I was not engaged in guiding those discussions. However, I found the method of scripting very difficult while being the instructor, as I had difficulty listening and responding to discussions while periodically writing down my observations. Only later during my listening to the audiotapes from the group work was I able to make any necessary observations of the meaning-making processes. The only loss of information, then, was during the plenary sessions, not audiotaped, in which I was a more active participant.

Data Analysis

For identifying and describing categories of the meaning-making processes, I used the constant comparative method delineated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I began my analysis of the data by working with the Readings One, reading ten compositions for each of eighteen students. I organized the compositions by poem so that my familiarity with each poem would allow me to concentrate on the category building. By constantly comparing the similarities and differences of the meaning-making processes students used in their Readings One for each poem, I was able to identify and describe major categories and subcategories for Reader-Response Theory, placing each category and its description on a note card. For instance, I noticed examples of students' using the text for supporting a point (Text Evidence) or using personal experience in relating to an idea in a poem (Parallel Associations). I labeled

these examples by category in the margins of the student compositions but did not include the examples themselves on the note cards.

I established major categories as distinct from subcategories by "making category properties explicit" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 342). For example, I at first labeled a major category as Prior Knowledge, the accessing of previous learning about the subject of a poem. Upon reaching the integrating stage of the constant comparative method, I realized that Prior Knowledge is just one characteristic in my major category of gap filling (Iser, 1974/1980), which I later named Parallel Associations. I define Parallel Associations as a meaning-making process by which the student makes connections between the poem and his or her knowledge, experience, imagination, or belief. I identify these subcategories as Prior Knowledge, Personal Experience, Imaginative Projection, and Ideological Stance (see Table on page 17).

In the next step, I worked with the combinations of Readings One and Two, reading all three composition packets for each of eighteen students. My reading of the combination Readings One and Two served two purposes in that I could observe the recursive, cumulative process for both individual and group construction of meaning. First, from a Reader-Response approach, I studied the recursive, cumulative process evident in students' individually rethinking their interpretations from Readings One to Readings Two. I identified and described major categories for this stage, placing them on note cards and noting them in the margins of the compositions per example. To illustrate, I observed that students would either maintain an original view (Maintain Original View) or modify it in some way (Change Original View), but without any indication of being influenced by group or class discussions.

Second, from the New Rhetoric approach, I studied the recursive, cumulative process evident in the social construction and negotiation of meaning. I identified and described major categories and subcategories on the note cards and noted examples in the margins of the compositions. At this juncture, I observed ways in which students argued their points of agreement and points of difference with other students in rethinking their own interpretations. To illustrate, students would demonstrate the major category Points of Agreement by agreeing with other views and using them to support their own ideas (subcategory Agree and Connect). Or they would demonstrate the major category Points of Difference by disagreeing with other views and pointing out what they believed to be erroneous thinking (subcategory Disagree with Reason). At other times, students would indicate comprehension of other views, but prefer their own (subcategory Disagree with Tolerance).

After establishing the categories and subcategories, I moved to the next stage of the constant comparative method—refining or delimiting the categories. I reduced the original list because of "improved articulation and integration" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 343), as I continued to cull more examples of the categories from the students' Readings One and Two. I derived from the data eight major categories and eleven subcategories for Reader-Response Theory and three major categories with eight subcategories for the New Rhetoric.

Subsequent to identifying and describing the finalized categories for both theories, I began the process of locating salient examples from those marked in the margins of the compositions. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) point out that qualitative data is naturally excessive and Wolcott (1990) recommends that the researcher "can" the majority of data obtained (p. 35). Therefore, as explained

in the "Purposive Sampling" section, I narrowed my study to include only the Readings One and Two combinations for accumulating examples of the categories. In this way, I was "doing less more thoroughly" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 69) because the recursive, cumulative process inherent in both the individual and the social construction and negotiation of meaning was better illustrated in this combination of Readings One and Two. I used the remaining Readings One from students not choosing to write again on a particular poem to verify any information included in Readings Two from other students.

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend for purposive sampling, examples should be refined to target the most relevant information in terms of emerging patterns but at the same time they are "to maximize information" (p. 202). In my study, I selected the most relevant examples from the student compositions in demonstrating the categories, but I maximized this information by including repetitive examples of the categories for each of the poems selected. (See Appendix for examples of student work.) This repetition of category examples could be interpreted as excessive, since another component of sampling Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend is termination when examples become redundant. For instance, the major category Text Evidence appears frequently in the examples, as students use passages from a poem to support their points. Similarly, the subcategory Imaginative Projection is accessed often as students explore the different possibilities for meaning through their imaginations. And students oftentimes apply the subcategory Agree and Connect to indicate their agreement with other students' points and how these points support their own. But I contend the repetitive examples are not redundant in that they provide a variety of illustrations for each category to

demonstrate the multiple possibilities of response for interpreting each poem. Teachers and professors of English would be especially interested in the examples about poems they have taught or would like to teach. The complete recording of examples is contained in my dissertation (Tompkins, 2001).

Unfortunately, the audiotapes were of poor quality because of the background noise created by each group's discussion. However, I was able to glean some salient examples for crosschecking passages students incorporated in their Readings Two from their group work, either for my clarifying or elaborating on their points or for my gaining deeper insights about particular passages. When relevant, I added excerpts from the audiotapes to examples from the Readings Two to further demonstrate specific categories.

Limitations of the Study

From the researcher's outsider stance, I had to work within the time frame of an academic unit that involved one intact class. As the insider, I had the advantage of knowing my students well. At the same time, as the outsider, I had to be unobtrusive in collecting data so that I did not interfere with the teaching-learning process. For example, in writing the field notes for my classroom observations, I frequently stopped observing and writing in order to attend to my students' questions. In refocusing my attention, I could have missed some points of interest to the study.

In analyzing the data, I kept an open mind about my observations and findings, letting the emerging patterns from the data guide me in my category development and interpretations. I am certainly influenced by the research studies I have encountered and even by my own previous published study of

Reader-Response Theory (Tompkins, 1997), but I have taken care not to be adoptive of the categories in the other studies.

Results of the Study

The Categories of Meaning-Making Processes

Reader-Response Theory: Reading One

The three major categories in operation for Readings One are Text Evidence, Parallel Associations, and Misreading (see Table on page 17). Text Evidence includes the student's attention to literary conventions; that is, the poetic elements of imagery, diction, metaphor/simile, symbol, structure, allusion, and theme. For this category, students relied on their interpretive strategies (Fish, 1976/1980), either learned from previous education or current instruction. The second major category, Parallel Associations, is essentially what Iser (1974/1980) calls gap filling, which is the reader's imagination working to construct meaning from what is not explicitly stated.

I have identified four subcategories for Parallel Associations. The first subcategory is the student's accessing Prior Knowledge about the subject of a poem, that is, any background information helpful in interpreting the poem. The second subcategory is Personal Experience, representing the student's finding a comparison from life experience that reflects ideas in the poem. Especially relevant to gap filling is my notion of Imaginative Projection, by which the student projects possibilities for meaning into the poem from his or her imagination. This third subcategory is similar to what Iser (1974/1980) labels "alien associations," or other possibilities for interpretation (pp. 61-62). The fourth subcategory is Ideological Stance, by which a student asserts his or her belief or opinion concerning a point raised in the poem.

Table: The Categories of Meaning-Making Processes

Reader-Response Theory: Reading One

Text Evidence: attention to literary conventions

Imagery	Structure
Diction	Allusion
Metaphor/simile	Theme
Symbol	

Parallel Associations: gap filling, the imagination constructing meaning

Prior Knowledge---background information
Personal Experience---comparisons to ideas in the poem
Imaginative Projection---possibilities for meaning
Ideological Stance---personal belief or opinion

Misreading: extraneous projection or misinterpretation of text evidence

Reader-Response Theory: Readings One and Two

Maintain Original View---little or no modification
Clarify Original View---refinement or elaboration
Add New Detail---material not included in previous reading
Change Original View---substantial modification
Maintain or Correct Misreading---misinterpretation carried or corrected

The New Rhetoric: Readings One and Two

Points of Agreement

Agree and Connect---material used for support or clarification
Agree and Adopt---new material accepted as viable to include
Degree of Adherence---partial agreement
Accept as Viable---acceptance of alternate views
Change or Modify---acceptance of alternate view in lieu of own

Points of Difference

Disagree with Reason---pointing out errors in thinking
Disagree with Tolerance---comprehension but preference for own view
Disagree with Respect---deference for maintaining social cohesion

Misreading---misinterpretation of Readings One or group/class discussion

For the third major category of Misreading, I noted infrequent instances where the student would misinterpret text evidence or imaginatively project extraneous ideas, or "mnemonic irrelevances" (Richards, 1929), not centered in the poem.

Reader-Response Theory: Readings One and Two

For studying how the students demonstrated the recursive, cumulative process from Reading One to Reading Two, I compared these two readings for each student's three selected poems from the ten studied. I found five main categories in operation here, as the students demonstrated different ways of rethinking or reflecting on their first readings. Students Maintain an Original View with little or no modification, Clarify an Original View by refining or elaborating on it, Add New Detail not included in Reading One, Change from an Original View by modifying it substantially, and Maintain or Correct a Misreading stated in Reading One.

The New Rhetoric: Readings One and Two

In my study of the Readings Two for each student's three selected poems, I derived three major categories for the social construction and negotiation of meaning of the New Rhetoric. I identified five subcategories for the Points of Agreement and three subcategories for the Points of Difference, as students demonstrated rethinking their views from Readings One after reading and discussing other students' views in the group work and the plenary session. As was true for the reader-response section, the third major category is Misreading, as students sometimes demonstrated misreadings of each other's work.

In the first subcategory for Points of Agreement, Agree and Connect, students linked other students' views to their own for support or clarification. For the second subcategory, Agree and Adopt, students adopted new views from other students not present in their Readings One. In the third subcategory, students showed a Degree of Adherence, or partial agreement, with other students' ideas but maintained their own views. In subcategory four, Accept as Viable, students accepted other students' views but maintained or defended their own. Finally, students altered their own views in accepting alternate perspectives as viable for subcategory Change or Modify.

In the first subcategory for Points of Difference, Disagree with Reason, students showed their disagreement by pointing out erroneous thinking in others' views. In subcategory two, Disagree with Tolerance, students disagreed with but showed tolerance for alternate views in stating that they could understand but not accept the other viewpoints, preferring their own. For the third subcategory, Disagree with Respect, students demonstrated deference for alternate interpretations that they could not accept in order to show consideration for the other perspectives while adhering to their own.

Conclusions and Implications

In this study I identified, described, and demonstrated my students' meaning-making processes as they interpreted and discussed the poems. In delineating the categories to reflect these processes, I illustrated how Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric work in combination to enable students to develop comprehensive readings of poetry. Through developing the categories, I became aware of the different ways students could relate to a poem and to each other in discourse communities. Having these categories of

meaning construction for future use will enable me, as well as other English professors or researchers, to better understand student work.

Particularly of interest are both the variety of categories that illustrate the meaning-making processes and the viability of the interpretations as exhibited in the student examples. These categories and examples demonstrate the quality of student thinking and rethinking in their interpretation of poems as they constructed Readings One, exchanged views in group discussion, and then refined their work to construct Readings Two. Moving through these steps in interpretation, students demonstrated more comprehensive readings in exploring meaning more in depth, mainly because of having the opportunity to reconsider a reading and to be influenced by peers. Professors and researchers can compare these categories and examples to those encountered in their previous teaching or research in order to gain better awareness of the thinking behaviors of students. The examples illustrate what students can achieve when allowed to think for themselves and to construct meaning as an interpretive community.

The next step would be to share this knowledge with students so that they can become aware of their own interpretive strategies. If students are more conscious of the thinking processes they use, they might be able to improve their understanding of poetry or another genre. In my explanation of the theory base to my classes, I could also include the kinds of meaning-making processes that are possible. Since every setting is unique, perhaps another group of students will demonstrate different categories along with some of the same categories. This purpose could be demonstrated in another study.

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Appendix

Student Individual and Communal Responses to the Poems

The research examples presented here were selected from student responses to three of the ten poems studied. A record of all the student examples from the study is contained in my dissertation (Tompkins, 2001). A student name beside the heading Reader Response Theory indicates the individual construction of meaning. Student names beside the heading The New Rhetoric indicate meaning constructed from the small-group work, whether appearing in Readings Two or in the audiotaped discussions. I have underlined the categories represented by each example (see Table on page 17). To preserve the integrity of student work, I replicated all misspellings and nonstandard usage errors as represented in the originals. To represent variations in the audiotapes, I use ellipsis for indicating unnecessary material omitted, "[pause]" for a student's silence, and "[inaudible]" for parts of the conversation that I could not transcribe.

"A Blessing" by James Wright

Reader-Response Theory: Sean

In Reading One, Sean views the poem as being about "the yearnings of a man wanting to break out of his shell hardened by the pressures of everyday life." For Reading Two, he elaborates (Clarify Original View) on this point by using Imaginative Projection in creating "a mental picture" of the persona not present in the first reading. Sean writes, "I have a vision of an older obese man sitting at his desk. He is crammed into his tiny cubical at work, day dreaming and longing to leave from the monotonous routines of a nine to five job. . . . This poor hardworking 'John Doe' has a place of serenity that he longs to visit. He

wants to find this place so he can be at peace." Sean, in using imaginative projection, gives the persona character traits and a life situation beyond the poem so that Sean can make sense of the persona's present moment.

The New Rhetoric: Carol with Sean and Howard

In Reading One, Carol interprets the last lines of the poem, which indicate that if the persona steps out of his body he would "blossom," as meaning " [T]he body is like a seed. A seed is a shell, ready to burst open and blossom." For Reading Two, she supports her view by connecting it (Agree and Connect) to Sean's interpretation of this line in his Reading One when he states, "I believe that this poem is filled with the yearnings of a man wanting to break out of his shell, hardened by the pressures of everyday life."

The New Rhetoric: Sean with Carol and Howard

Sean indicates a Degree of Adherence to Carol's view when she interprets the blossoming as a crossing over to nature from the human world at death. To support her view, he points out "The metaphors that the character uses makes many of us feel like we are in such a blissful state, this blissful state is known as heaven." Sean paraphrases Carol's spiritual interpretation of these lines by stating "It is a metaphor for when the body dies, the spirit is ready to burst," but he adds his worldly view that the poem's lines mean "if he stepped out of his daily routine that he would become a new person. He would bloom into a new individual, someone beautiful and happy." Here Sean combines his own metaphor of breaking out of a shell and Carol's metaphor of the bursting seed in showing his partial agreement with her view.

The New Rhetoric: Julie, Wendy, Stanley, and Adrian

During this group's audiotaped discussion, Stanley points out erroneous thinking (Disagree with Reason) regarding the imagery. Julie contends, "I think they're wild ponies [inaudible], so they really don't have owners. So they're just out there alone all day [inaudible]. He's [the persona] probably the only one to come to visit them." Wendy responds, "That's very good. I never thought about it like that." Julie continues, "They're wild. They don't have nobody loving them [inaudible]." However, Stanley refutes her point by referring to Text Evidence that discloses the ponies are owned: "Well, they're in . . . there's barbed wire, though, in the pasture."

Adrian then builds on Stanley's point: "Yeah, it could all just be symbolism, you know. The barbed wire could be symbolizing the just, you know, the barriers that animals have with man or it could be a literal [pause]." Stanley then supports Adrian's latter point: "It could be a Freud—a cigar is just a cigar." The members laugh. Stanley continues, "That's what he used to say: 'Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar'—no other meaning to it. There's nothin' other than the fact it is just a literal object. He's here in the location . . . this is out in the Midwest. He says the word *pasture* so that does mean an isolated area used for grazing." Adrian supports Stanley's point (Accept as Viable): "Yeah, I mean, when I read it I took it as literally being a fence, but, you know [pause]." Adrian did not pursue the symbolism idea, and Julie did not defend her contention that the ponies are wild.

"The Unknown Citizen" by W. H. Auden

Reader-Response Theory: Paul

Paul expresses in Reading One that a strength of the poem is in helping him use his imagination. He clarifies this idea (Clarify Original View) in Reading Two and includes an ideological statement (Ideological Stance): "[T]he fantasy of the seemingly perfect man makes me use my imagination to put myself in his position which I found to be an interesting experince. I couldn't see myself as being the 'unknown citizen' though, because I, like most other people in my generation, want to be known for something when they die."

The New Rhetoric: Alex with Chris and Paul

Alex relies on Chris's view of the citizen to support his notion (Agree and Connect) that the poem "tells the story of a 'normal' man leading a 'normal' life." He continues, "but in my opinion the poet questions our perception of what being 'normal' is." Alex quotes from Chris's Reading One: "I feel that the persona is trying to tell us that this man had basically everything that he needed, physically, in his life. Somewhere along the course of this man's life he started to wear down mentally and emotionally." Alex then connects Chris's idea to his own questioning about the poem: "I think Chris raises two hard questions: Can a man be 'successful' with only his physical needs met, and; Why would someone so 'successful' begin to break down emotionally and mentally?" In Reading Two, Alex repeats a question he pondered in Reading One: "How can we be free or happy when our success and sense of being is relative to how others view our accomplishments and us?" He adds an answer (Clarify Original View) for Reading Two: "In my eyes this cannot even be considered living. To be constrained from doing something you know to be

right by the fear of what the majority of other people will say or do cannot in any way be construed to be freedom."

The New Rhetoric: Chris with Alex and Paul

Initially, for Reading One, Chris uses Text Evidence and Prior Knowledge to support his theory that the citizen is a potential suicide. He states, "The persona leads me to believe that this person may have committed suicide. One reason is, there is a higher rate for suicide with former veterans of war. The men that have come home from the wars, especially the Vietnam, had a high rate of suicide in large part because instead of coming back heroes they came back with no respect for fighting the war." Chris is confusing the Vietnam War with other wars, and he is Misreading the text in stating that "the pressure of succeeding in finding a good job was very hard on him." Obviously, Chris has not noticed the text evidence of the citizen's having a steady job.

For Reading Two, however, Chris changes his view (Change or Modify) through the influence of Paul's Reading One, from which Chris quotes: "The man in the poem is not only a model father and employee, but also a model of what the poet believes is a responsible grown man." Chris corrects his Misreading and elaborates on this new view: "When I first read the poem I did not see his point of view. I felt that this man . . . was not a model citizen but a man who had committed suicide due to the pressures of veterans coming back home from war. After discussing this with Paul I realized that he may be right. For instance, this man had a factory job, a satisfied employer, good family, and everything else necessary for the modern man."

The New Rhetoric: Howard with Marilyn and Stanley

Howard changes his interpretation of this poem (Change or Modify) because of the influence of a group member and the class discussion. In Reading One, he describes the citizen as someone to be admired because the persona is "always positive throughout the poem." Howard relates this citizen to his Personal Experience in observing how a person can influence other people: "There is someone who has made a difference in their lives, and the unknown citizen has definitely done this." However, in Reading Two, Howard adopts (Agree and Adopt) Stanley's view of the citizen as being subject to the control of the state. Howard paraphrases Stanley's idea: "He says that since the unknown citizen done everything for the greater community; the society had to be one that frowned upon personal success." Howard elaborates on this new view: "This man appears to be just doing what is told of him and not what he want to do, so the reader begins to ask himself/herself is the unknown citizen really happy?" He adds, "I didn't even think about this the first few times I read this poem."

The New Rhetoric: Julie with Mark, Scott, and Patty

In her Reading Two, Julie adopts (Agree and Adopt) Patty's ideological question (Ideological Stance) about the presence of God in the citizen's life. She paraphrases Patty's idea in referring to the last two lines of the poem: "[E]ven though everything the man had accomplished in his life made the persona seem happy, if there was no God in his life, he truly may have not been happy emotionally." Julie also adopts Mark's religious view, expressed in group discussion, of the persona's storing treasures in heaven. She responds, "I believe the poem was not meant to sound like a perfect and non-realistic life,

but the way a person lives his/her own life without letting the fame and worldly values get in the way."

"Facing It" by Yusef Komunyakaa

Reader-Response Theory: Sean

Sean accesses Prior Knowledge and Personal Experience to provide additional insight (Add New Detail) for Reading Two, not included in Reading One. He remarks, "The Vietnam War was by far one of the brutal and savage wars ever fought. It is hard for many veterans to express their emotions on war. My uncle that is a Veteran of the Vietnam War will not talk about his experiences in the war. The war holds many painful memories for him. These excruciating memories are hard for people in my generation to comprehend. My fellow peers and I have been fortunate enough not to have ever had to deal with the horrible aspects that come along with war."

The New Rhetoric: Paul with Stanley, Mark, and Jimmy

Paul accepts the other student views as viable and even shows deference for them, yet he maintains his own interpretation (Disagree with Tolerance; Disagree with Respect). As he states, "During a group discussion I found that some of my classmates opinions on the poem were more appealing than the one I had." Paul's view is that the persona is a ghost, "a person in spiritual form inside the Vietnam Veterans Memorial" returning to tell his story from "within his own mind." Both Mark and Stanley view the persona as being alive and standing at the wall remembering the war. But Paul prefers his own view, "I could see things in the same light as both saw it. As a matter of fact, I first interperted the poem the same way as they did, but decided to go with something different, that's why I came out with the ghost thing."

The New Rhetoric: Wendy with Chris and Howard

Wendy adds a new point to her Reading Two developed from her learning the views of her group members, which she adopts (Agree and Adopt). She now sees the persona as being "in constant battle with himself" in light of the Readings One statements she quotes from Chris and Howard. Chris states, "He may feel that he let himself down by not dying in the war himself." And Howard reflects, "It is hard to come back from war and be the same person as when you left." Wendy adds, "The ones that survived are still in a personal war of their own."

The New Rhetoric: Adrian with Seth, Scott, and Sean

Adrian disagrees with Scott's comment from his Reading One that the persona had "a lot of near death experiences during the war" because Adrian feels the poem is centered on the casualties rather than on the persona (Disagree with Reason). Adrian responds, "I think that most of his terrible memories involve the deaths of his friends." Whereas Scott relies on the Text Evidence describing the persona's expectation of finding his own name on the wall, Adrian points to the lines that describe a particular friend, Andrew Johnson. But Adrian agrees (Agree and Adopt) with Seth's statement "The war has killed his mind" by pointing to the same line (Text Evidence) Seth chooses as support, which states the persona is both stone and flesh. Adrian observes, "The evidence is in the paradox. . . . This is a powerful line that allows the reader to see that the veteran feels dead to the world."

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